SAFETY BULLETIN

Keys for Creating a Safety Culture

- **Increase worker engagement:** Building a culture of safety awareness takes the engagement of the people who will benefit most – your workers. Insightful companies ask employees to participate in jobsite safety walks, lead safety meetings and assist in pre-task plan and task hazard analysis. Employees should also be asked to join in near-miss accident investigations as teachable moments. And seasoned employees should mentor inexperienced workers new to the construction trades.

- **Share best practices:** Thanks to the internet, accessing safety information and sharing best practices can be as close as your keyboard. Webinars featuring online lessons learned and communication with colleagues facing similar challenges can make sharing best practices more convenient than ever. Additionally, industry associations such as the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) and the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP) offer opportunities to access and share safety best practices.

- **Address language barriers:** In years past, most safety information was available in "English-only" formats. Workers who didn't speak or understand English had to rely on bilingual workers for help or simply pretended they understood the training. Provide safety training in languages all employees can understand and absorb.

- **Reduce soft tissue injuries:** Soft tissue injuries are a persistent problem in construction. Consider developing formal training covering material handling, the use of equipment or mechanical advantage to move materials, and restrictions on the amount of weight employees can lift and carry. Also, implement stretching regimes at the start of every shift, perhaps including after breaks and lunch.

- **Leverage modular and prefab construction:** An increasing number of building components can be constructed off-site and then brought to the job for installation. Constructing parts off-site under controlled conditions helps to improve safety, since workers aren't required to work on elevated work platforms or outside exposed to weather. It can also improve the quality of the final product.

- **Monitor worker readiness:** Construction workers need to be prepared, both physically and mentally, to do the job. Substance abuse, opioid use or fatigue can impair a worker's ability to stay alert and make safe decisions on and off the site. This is also an important consideration for fleet drivers, who should be informed of the company's policy on distracted driving and substance use. Drivers should also be regularly monitored for fatigue.

- **Evaluate and improve fall protection:** Of the nearly 60 percent of fatalities related to the "Fatal Four" discussed earlier, 39 percent were due to falls alone. Companies must better plan for their fall protection needs, ensuring anchorages, bodywear and connecting devices engineered and/or evaluated by qualified personnel.

- **The entire workforce relentlessly pursues the identification and remediation of hazards.** Correcting hazards as quickly as possible and maintaining good communications around hazards will not only create a safer workplace, it will improve your employees' engagement. Frontline employees who believe management takes care of hazards are more willing to participate fully in safety initiatives.

- **Employees at all levels are equally comfortable stopping each other when at-risk behavior is observed and recognizing each other when safe behavior is observed.** While good constructive feedback is important for improvement, positive reinforcement for safe behavior is essential for building safe habits. The more actively involved all levels of the organization are in delivering positive reinforcement for behaviors consistent with the desired culture, the stronger the culture will be.

- **No one is blamed for near misses or incidents. Instead, systemic causes are pursued.** Often when people engage in at-risk behaviors that lead to incidents, there are organizational systems and practices that inadvertently encourage those at-risk practices. It is important to uncover those and establish accountability for making the changes to the systems and practices to encourage safe behavior.

- **The fear of discipline which drives under-reporting and stifles involvement has been driven out of the culture.** Discipline has a place, but most safety issues can be effectively dealt with without discipline, which has side effects that work against building a culture of safety. When discipline is used disproportionately in relation to positive consequences it leads to lower morale, reduced trust, lower productivity, less teamwork and lack of engagement. Equally disturbing is that it suppresses reporting incidents which cripples the organizations ability to learn from mistakes and become more proactive.

- **The workforce is characterized by good relationships at all levels.** Trust is an essential component for an effective safety culture. As noted above, mistakes and errors, while unfortunate, provide invaluable learning. Employees who have good working relationships with management are more likely to speak openly and honestly about what is working, what is not and what still needs to change. They are also more engaged in other aspects of safety.

- **Safety is integrated into day-to-day work.** It is not treated as something separate to be discussed during a weekly safety meeting or only at shift change. Safety should be part of every conversation and considered in every decision.

- **Successes are celebrated along the way.** Pride shouldn't be focused solely on a company's safety record, but also in what is being done every day, all day to achieve that record.

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